

# The NICHD Connection

## March 2021

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#### EDITOR IN CHIEF

Shana R. Spindler, PhD  
shana.spindler@nih.gov

#### LAYOUT & DESIGN

Nichole Swan

#### BACKGROUND PHOTOGRAPHY

See [Credits page](#) online

#### CONTRIBUTORS

Triesta Fowler, MD  
Fady Hannah-Shmouni, MD,  
DABIM, AHSCP, FRCPC  
Lauren Walling, PhD

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<http://newsletter.nichd.nih.gov>

## Meet Dr. Aisha Burton, a Scientist and Role Model

*#FirstGenDoc #BlackinMicro*

*By Shana R. Spindler, PhD*

A role model is someone whose example inspires others to reach similar successes. When you start out in science, you look up to others for evidence that your goals are achievable. And then as you make progress, others look up to you. Dr. Aisha Burton, recently listed in *Cell Mentor's* list of [1,000 Inspiring Black Scientists in America](#), is a role model for both female and Black scientists. Read below for Dr. Burton's reaction to the *Cell Mentor* honor and her personal experiences with community support:

### ***What does it mean to you that Cell Mentor published a list of 1,000 Inspiring Black Scientists in America?***

It is an amazing honor, and I am truly humbled to be included on such a star-studded list! It was great to see many of my colleagues on this list! I'm happy that it is bringing awareness that Black scientists do exist in many different fields.

### ***When did you develop your interest in science?***

When I was a child, I was very curious about the world around me. My mother used to take me to Sandridge Nature Center (South Holland, IL) as a child, and I would learn about the nature around us (birds, snakes, types of grasses, etc.). I also helped her around the garden and would ask tons of questions. My parents put me in a science camp over summer breaks, and I would always come home excited to tell them what I learned. In high school, my AP chemistry teacher, Mr. Stark, really made chemistry lab fun, and I enjoyed his class. That is when I knew I wanted to pursue a science degree.



Aisha Burton, PhD  
[@Aisha\\_Burton](#)

**Mentor:** Dr. Gisela "Gigi" Storz

**Area of research:** Regulatory roles of small proteins on two component systems in *E. coli*

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## Letter from the Editor

I have an older female friend who loves science and talks about how she didn't know a woman could go into research. She's from a small rural town, where females choose between a handful of career options. Had her high school counselor told her about careers in science, she would have pursued that early interest. But her lack of a female scientist role model meant that she didn't know a scientific career was possible for herself.

Role models from underrepresented groups are essential to the future growth of every field. "Studies have demonstrated that individuals who observe and interact with career role models who have a similar background have greater persistence in their STEM career," wrote Dr. Marie Bernard, acting director of the NIH Scientific Workforce Diversity Office, in [her online blog](#).

This month, we continue our focus on support for underrepresented groups in science. Check out our [Q&A with Dr. Aisha Burton](#), recently named one of "1,000 Inspiring Black Scientists in America" by *Cell Mentor*. As a female Black scientist, Dr. Burton stands at the intersection of two underrepresented groups—something she has celebrated throughout her career and in social media.

To continue the discussion beyond this month, we are beginning a new column to raise awareness of issues surrounding equity, diversity, and inclusion. Our inaugural article, "[Deconstructing Bias: Uncover, Disarm, Educate](#)," covers the definition of bias and offers several resources to help break the cycle of racial disparities.

If you have questions or need support with these issues, please reach out to Dr. Triesta Fowler ([triesta.fowler-lee@nih.gov](mailto:triesta.fowler-lee@nih.gov)) in the NICHD Office of Education. Dr. Fowler leads the NICHD DIR diversity initiatives.

We wrap up this issue with supportive sentiments from Dr. Fady Hannah-Shmouni in our "[Clinical Corner](#)" column, updates from the latest FelCom meeting in our regular "[Rep Report](#)," and many [March announcements](#) and [events](#)!

Your Editor in Chief,  
Shana R. Spindler, PhD

Do you have an idea you'd like covered in the newsletter? Email our editor at [shana.spindler@nih.gov](mailto:shana.spindler@nih.gov).



## Meet Dr. Aisha Burton

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***As you pursued a scientific career, did you have any role models or mentors who provided a voice of support for your career goals?***

I have had a lot of mentors along the way who have helped mold me into the scientist I am today. A few of them are:

- » **Dr. William Walden** at University of Illinois at Chicago gave me my first job as a dishwasher when I was a freshman in college (and he was also the first Black PI I ever met in STEM).
- » **Dr. Judy Wall** was an excellent mentor, and it was in her lab at the University of Missouri where I fell in love with microbiology. She was very encouraging of me to apply to graduate school. I was also a [Post-Baccalaureate Research Education Program \(PREP\) scholar](#) during this time, and the program was very supportive of my goals too!
- » **Dr. Daniel Kearns** was my PhD advisor at Indiana University. He is very supportive of his trainees and the students in the microbiology section. He taught me the importance of taking care of your mental health while on the PhD journey.
- » Last, but not least, **Dr. Gisela "Gigi" Storz** (NICHD) has been a great mentor! As soon as I started as a postdoc, she was interested in my goals and allowed me time to explore. By doing so, I was able to home in on a career in academia at smaller institutions.

***As you progress in your career, trainees from underrepresented groups in science will look up to you as a role model. Is there anything you want to tell them?***

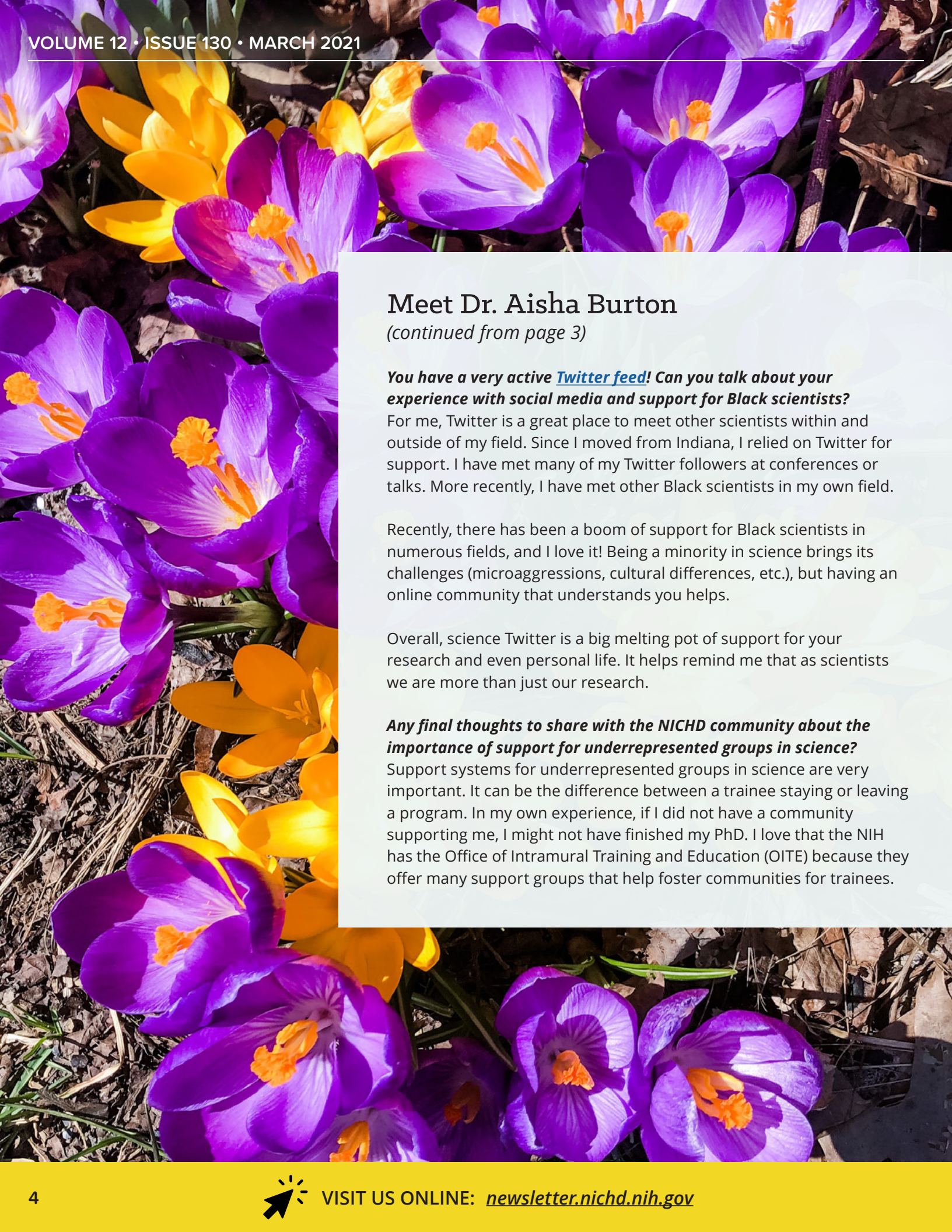
The journey will be hard but stay the course. If this degree is what you want, don't let anyone take you from your goal. Build a community that supports you and wants you to succeed. I was able to succeed by building my own community of family, friends, and mentors.

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Check out the [NICHD Instagram #Womeninscience series](#) for more of Dr. Aisha Burton's story.





## Meet Dr. Aisha Burton

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***You have a very active [Twitter feed](#)! Can you talk about your experience with social media and support for Black scientists?***

For me, Twitter is a great place to meet other scientists within and outside of my field. Since I moved from Indiana, I relied on Twitter for support. I have met many of my Twitter followers at conferences or talks. More recently, I have met other Black scientists in my own field.

Recently, there has been a boom of support for Black scientists in numerous fields, and I love it! Being a minority in science brings its challenges (microaggressions, cultural differences, etc.), but having an online community that understands you helps.

Overall, science Twitter is a big melting pot of support for your research and even personal life. It helps remind me that as scientists we are more than just our research.

***Any final thoughts to share with the NICHD community about the importance of support for underrepresented groups in science?***

Support systems for underrepresented groups in science are very important. It can be the difference between a trainee staying or leaving a program. In my own experience, if I did not have a community supporting me, I might not have finished my PhD. I love that the NIH has the Office of Intramural Training and Education (OITE) because they offer many support groups that help foster communities for trainees.





## Deconstructing Bias: *Uncover, Disarm, Educate*

By Triesta Fowler, MD

This column will provide tools and resources that you can use to help you become aware and educate yourself on the issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion. These topics can be very difficult to address and understand. The resources offered here can help you begin the journey of discovery and learn how you can play your part in breaking the cycle of racial disparities and bias that have become rooted into society, as well as biomedical research. So, let us start by discussing what defines bias.



### BIAS

The Cambridge Dictionary defines “Bias” as *the action of supporting or opposing a particular person or thing in an unfair way, because of allowing personal opinions to influence your judgment*. Some bias thoughts we are aware of, but others occur outside of our consciousness or control and are developed based on many factors. The idea that it unconsciously develops should encourage each of us to explore our own ideas and beliefs to discover if any of them are biased. This may not be easy, but it is imperative if we want to challenge and change this way of thinking.

### RESOURCES

- » [Implicit Bias](#) – NIH Office of the Director Scientific Workforce Diversity
- » [Ways to Mitigate Your Bias By Amanda Dumsch](#) – NIH OITE Careers Blog
- » [ebook - Sway: Unravelling Unconscious Bias by Pragya Agarwal](#) – via NIH Library
- » [How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them](#) [Ted Talk by Diversity Advocate Vernā Myers]
- » Asplund, M., & Welle, C.G. (2018). [Advancing science: How bias holds us back.](#) *Neuron*, 99(4), 635–639.

## A Commitment to Support for Underrepresented Groups in Science and Studies

By Fady Hannah-Shmouni, MD, DABIM, AHSCP, FRCPC

Women and ethnic minorities remain underrepresented in science and in leadership positions across scientific organizations. Representation of women of color is even lower across the industry, academia, and federal workforces. Examining the views and experiences of those impacted and developing strategies to overcome this gap is a crucial step for any organization.

*Clinical  
Corner*

The NICHD Office of Education is committed to supporting underrepresented groups in STEM through diversity initiatives, including the NICHD Developing Talent Scholars Program and the NICHD Fellows Recruitment Incentive Award. But we need to consider minority representation within clinical studies too. Last month in this column, Esther Kwarteng wrote about the [importance of diversity in clinical trials](#). The NICHD clinical training programs are committed to making progress on this front.

To give one specific example: staff clinician and former clinical fellow [Dr. Crystal Kamilaris](#) is leading a [protocol](#) to study genes that may cause primary aldosteronism in individuals who are Black, African American, or of Caribbean decent. This research stems from findings that African Americans have increased susceptibility to aldosterone excess; they are more likely to have congestive heart failure, end-stage renal disease, and atherosclerotic events than age-matched Caucasians. Clearly, representation in clinical trials is important for the development of diagnostics/treatments for minority populations—who may have unique risk factors present.

As you continue your research and clinical careers, please commit to joining us in supporting and advocating for equality, inclusion, and diversity across the sciences and within clinical studies.



*Fady Hannah-Shmouni, MD,  
DABIM, AHSCP, FRCPC  
Director of Graduate Medical  
Education, NICHD DIR*



## The Rep Report

*By Lauren Walling, PhD*

As the current NICHD Basic Sciences Institutes and Centers (IC) Representative, I represent NICHD postdoctoral fellows at the Fellows Committee (FelCom) meeting every month and share the latest news with you here. Do you have a concern or question that you want brought up at the next meeting? Contact me at [lauren.walling@nih.gov](mailto:lauren.walling@nih.gov)!



The **Recreation and Welfare/Health and Wellness Committees** received approval to form the new Health & Recreation Subcommittee. This subcommittee will promote health and well-being by developing activities centered on fitness, self-care, and health habits. Keep an eye out for events organized by this group in the future! Additionally, join the [Bethesda Postdocs Slack](#) page to network with other postdocs, join game nights, running club, and more.

The **FARE committee** will be accepting applications for the FARE 2022 awards from February 10 to March 10. If you are interested in being a judge, registration began on February 10.

The **DIS-VFC Immigration Symposium** will be held virtually on March 9. Topics of discussion include COVID-related travel restrictions and J1 to H1b orientation. Information is available at: <https://www.ors.od.nih.gov/pes/dis/AboutDIS/Pages/UpcomingEvents.aspx>.

The **Career Development Committee** is looking for new members to help organize and host their monthly career panels. If you are interested in this opportunity, please contact Kanchan Gupta ([kanchan.gupta@nih.gov](mailto:kanchan.gupta@nih.gov)) or Tam Vo ([tam.vo@nih.gov](mailto:tam.vo@nih.gov)).



*Lauren Walling, PhD*



## March Announcements

### FARE 2022 TRAVEL AWARD COMPETITION

*Submit an abstract for a chance to win a \$1,500 travel award*

The NIH **Fellows Award for Research Excellence (FARE)** competition is **NOW OPEN**. FARE recognizes outstanding scientific research by intramural NIH fellows and graduate students. Abstracts will be evaluated anonymously, and the **top 25% of applicants** will receive a \$1,500 travel award to present their exciting and novel research at a scientific meeting during FY2022 (October 1, 2021 to September 30, 2022).

#### HOW TO APPLY:

Submit your abstract online via <https://www2.training.nih.gov/transfer/fareapp> until **March 10, 2021 (5:00 PM)**.

#### WHO IS ELIGIBLE:

- » Postdoctoral fellows with less than five years total postdoctoral experience within the NIH intramural research program
- » Pre-doctoral IRTAs performing their doctoral dissertation research at NIH and graduate students in the Graduate Partnerships Program (GPP)

Winners will be announced by August 19, 2021.

For more information, go to [www.training.nih.gov/felcom/fare/faqs](http://www.training.nih.gov/felcom/fare/faqs).

For questions and concerns, contact the FARE 2022 committee at [FARE@mail.nih.gov](mailto:FARE@mail.nih.gov).

### DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE SCIENTIFIC INTEREST GROUP (SIG) AWARDS?

**SIG** Awards were introduced to the Fellows Award for Research Excellence (FARE) Competition in 2018 to further recognize and merit the work of FARE awardees, and to provide an opportunity for them to showcase their research to the wider scientific community. The **SIG Award** involves the selection of a winning abstract from the FARE Competition by participating SIGs that they deem to be of high scientific merit. These awardees are then invited to present their work at one of the SIG meetings.

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## March Announcements

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### SCIENTIFIC INTEREST GROUP (SIG) AWARDS, *CONTINUED*

Congratulations to our two NICHD fellows who received SIG awards during last year's FARE 2021 competition:



**Dr. Christopher Rhodes (Petros lab)**

*Single-Cell Genomics Interest Group*

"Integration of single cell transcriptomes and chromosome accessibility to detect regulatory elements critical to interneuron development"



**Dr. Joyce Thompson (Rocha lab)**

*Transcription Scientific Interest Group*

"Rapid reshuffling of master transcription factors allows exit from plasticity to establish cell-fate"

### NICHD FARE 2021 SIG Runners-Up by Interest Group:

#### Decode Chromatin Interest Group

- » Dr. Joyce Thompson (Rocha lab)

#### Neurobiology Interest Group

- » Dr. Miranda Marvel (Weinstein lab)
- » Dr. Cole Malloy (Hoffman lab)

#### Protein Trafficking and Organelle Dynamics Interest Group

- » Dr. Joshua Pemberton (Balla lab)

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## March Announcements

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### THE BUSINESS OF SCIENCE: YOUR GUIDE TO CAREER SUCCESS

This month, the NICHD Office of Education is offering a virtual bootcamp training, led by [SciPhD](#), for all fellows and graduate students who are planning their professional career transition.

This training will take place as a series of four live webinars that cover the following:

- » Finding jobs
- » Analyzing job ads to determine your skill match and qualifications
- » Developing experience statements and accomplishments that demonstrate your qualifications
- » Generating a draft formatted targeted resume
- » Preparing for the interview process

*Additionally, there will be a virtual networking reception, where you will have the opportunity to meet and speak with representatives from companies that are actively hiring scientists.*

#### Virtual Bootcamp Schedule:

Session 1	The Business of Science, Dissecting a Job Ad to Identify Critical Skills, Targeted Resumes, Flamingo Software Training	Tuesday, March 16 9 AM – 12:30 PM
Session 2	Technical Literacy, Emotional Intelligence, Social Intelligence, Behavioral Interview Exercise	Wednesday, March 17 9 AM – 1 PM
Session 3	Applied Networking, LinkedIn, Networking Reception	Thursday, March 18 12 noon – 4 PM
Session 4	Project Management, Negotiating Your Departure with Your PI, Negotiating Salary, Q&A	Friday, March 19 9 AM – 1 PM

[SciPhD](#) has worked with over 120 institutions since their start, providing support to thousands of academic scientists for their successful transition to their next position.

Each participant will receive their own individual license to the [SciPhD](#) online web application [Flamingo®](#), which allows you to put into action the skills you learn in the webinars. Import a job ad, use Flamingo®'s Job Analytics Engine to identify critical skills, and generate a targeted resume.

If you would like to sign up for these live webinar sessions, please contact Ms. Monica Cooper at [cooperm@mail.nih.gov](mailto:cooperm@mail.nih.gov).

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## March Announcements

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### NIH IPPCR COURSE ONLINE: REGISTRATION STILL OPEN

Interested in expanding your clinical research knowledge base in 2021? Registration for the **2020–2021 NIH Introduction to the Principles and Practice of Clinical Research (IPPCR) course** is still open!

This free, self-paced, online course is open for registration until July 1, 2021. Graduate students, clinical fellows and post-doctoral fellows are encouraged to enroll now.

The IPPCR course is a lecture series from thought-leaders around the world covering:

- » Study designs, measurement, and statistics
- » Ethical, legal, monitoring, and regulatory considerations
- » Preparation and implementation of clinical studies
- » Communication of research findings and other topics

To register, please visit the IPPCR website at <https://ocr.od.nih.gov/courses/ippcr.html>. If you have any questions, please contact Rebecca Hwang at [ippcr2@mail.nih.gov](mailto:ippcr2@mail.nih.gov).

### NIH PCP COURSE ONLINE: REGISTRATION STILL OPEN

Registration is still open for the **2020–2021 NIH Principles of Clinical Pharmacology (PCP) Course!**

The PCP course is a free online lecture series covering the fundamentals of clinical pharmacology as a translational scientific discipline focused on rational drug development and utilization in therapeutics. Topics covered in the course include pharmacokinetics, drug therapy in special populations, drug discovery and development, and pharmacogenomics.

The course is free, self-paced, and entirely online through the PCP website: <https://ocr.od.nih.gov/courses/principles-clinical-pharmacology.html>.

A certificate of completion is awarded to participants who achieve a passing score on the final exam.

The course will be of interest to graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and clinical fellows interested in expanding their pharmacology knowledge base.

For additional information on the course, please visit the website above or contact Rebecca Hwang at [odpcp@mail.nih.gov](mailto:odpcp@mail.nih.gov).

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## March Announcements

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### SAVE THE DATE: APRIL 22, TAKE YOUR CHILD TO WORK DAY

#### **NIH's 27<sup>th</sup> Annual "Take Your Child to Work Day"**

Thursday, April 22, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Virtual Only

NIH's annual "Take Your Child to Work Day (TYCTWD)" is going VIRTUAL this year.

Over the past 12 months, every day has been "take our children to work." This event will provide children grades 1–12 an opportunity to see how your efforts contribute to the NIH—our nation's biomedical research agency—and inspire them to explore career paths in science and public service.

#### ***Please note this year's registration timeline:***

- » March 16 at 12 noon: Pre-registration (Site opens for you to enter your child/ren's information and preview activities ONLY).
- » March 23 at 12 noon: Registration Phase 1 (Register child/ren for up to 2 limited space activities each).
- » March 30 at 12 noon: Registration Phase 2 (Register child/ren for up to 2 additional limited space activities for a maximum of four limited space activities).

The Office of Research Services, Program and Employee Services is the primary sponsor of TYCTWD 2021. More information can be found at the [TYCTWD Site](#). Please email any questions and comments to [Take-Your-Child-To-Work@nih.gov](mailto:Take-Your-Child-To-Work@nih.gov).



## March Events

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3, 1–2 PM

**Annual Postbac Course: “Meet the Scientist: Clinical Research”**

*Led by Fady Hannah-Shmouni, MD, DABIM, AHSCP, FRCPC*

*Internal Medicine-Endocrinology, Hypertension & Metabolic Genetics Director,  
Graduate Medical Education, NICHD Office of Education*

If you are interested in joining the class, please email Monica Cooper at  
[cooperm@mail.nih.gov](mailto:cooperm@mail.nih.gov).

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 1–2 PM

**Annual Postbac Course: “The Medical School Personal Statement”**

*Led by Triesta Fowler, MD*

*Director of Communications and Outreach for the NICHD Office of Education*

If you are interested in joining the class, please email Monica Cooper at  
[cooperm@mail.nih.gov](mailto:cooperm@mail.nih.gov).

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 1–2 PM

**“Building Resiliency in 2021 – Combatting Burnout and Pandemic Fatigue”**

*Ms. Kathleen Crowley, LCSW, ACSW, CEAP*

*Work-Life and Clinical Supervisor at LifeWork Strategies*

*Online Only.*

The past year did not come with a roadmap. We have had many twists and turns with times of uncertainty that have left us feeling fatigued and experiencing burn-out due to the pandemic. We invite you to join this webinar as speaker, Ms. Kathleen Crowley, LCSW, ACSW, CEAP, defines stress and resiliency, identifies the qualities of effective coping, and discusses the skills necessary for building and maintaining resiliency.

This webinar is open to everyone in the NIH community. Reserve your webinar seat now using the following link: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8746254771911582733>.

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## March Events

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TUESDAY, MARCH 23, 10–11 AM

### **Mandatory Training: Your Rights and Responsibilities as an NIH Trainee**

*(Research Fellows and Clinical Fellows are encouraged, but not required, to attend.)*

*Participation in this training is only required once.*

OITE will provide a virtual **mandatory** training for **all trainees** (IRTAs and Visiting Fellows) regarding your rights and responsibilities as a trainee, especially around new policies at the NIH. The goal of this session is to provide you with information to make sure that you are safe while at the NIH, and that you know the policies and resources to set yourself up for personal and career success.

Please register at [https://nih.zoomgov.com/webinar/register/WN\\_Idem9zCeTCerjlfLOKYT\\_A](https://nih.zoomgov.com/webinar/register/WN_Idem9zCeTCerjlfLOKYT_A).

*(NIH email required for registration)*

## MARCH AND APRIL

### **Three-Minute Talks (TmT)**

Individual coaching/practice sessions with Scott Morgan. Practice your talk and obtain feedback on oral presentation skills and speech development.

This event requires registration. For more information, please contact Monica Cooper at [cooperm@mail.nih.gov](mailto:cooperm@mail.nih.gov).

The NICHD and NIH TmT competitions will be held in early June and during the last week of June, respectively. Dates to be announced in the coming weeks.



## ONGOING EVENTS AROUND CAMPUS

### **NIH-Wide Office of Intramural Training and Education (OITE) Events**

For more information and registration, please visit [Upcoming OITE Events](#).

### **NIH Library Training and Events**

For more information and registration, please visit the [NIH Library Calendar](#).